



# FORESTS OF INLAND SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

## 19TH CENTURY LUMBERING IN THE SAN BERNARDINO MOUNTAINS

The first known lumbering in the San Bernardino Mountains was in 1819 when timbers were needed to support the roofs at the *Asistencia*. Big cone spruce was cut from lower Mill Creek Canyon.

William Wolfskill used timber from Mill Creek Canyon to build a boat for hunting sea otters off the coast of Los Angeles in 1831. Lumber was transported to San Gabriel by *carreta*.

Juan Bandini was granted the first formal request to cut timber in the public domain in 1839. He needed materials to construct buildings on his Rincon Rancho. He was granted a 30-year cutting privilege; he cut trees near the head of Devil's Canyon (today's Sawpit Canyon).

In 1841, Daniel Sexton hired Indian labor at 25 cents per day to cut timber near San Gorgonio Pass for use in constructing buildings on the Chino Rancho.

Luis Vignes established the first sawmill in the San Bernardino Mountains in the early 1850s. This mill in lower Mill Creek Canyon, also called Aliso's mill and the Chino mill, supplied timber for building the church at Agua Mansa in 1853. Logs used for wooden water pipe in Los Angeles came from the Vignes Mill.

In 1853 the Mormon mill, operated by water power, opened upstream from the Vignes mill. Demand for lumber grew in through the 1850s for building in San Bernardino Valley and in Los Angeles.

A "sawpit" was a site where lumber was cut by hand using whipsaws up to seven feet long. Two men could saw from 100 to 200 feet of timber in a day. The first steam-operated circular saw used for lumbering in the mountains was at the James Mill in Little Bear Valley, near present-day Blue Jay. In 1865, this area was the only reliable source of water east of Seely Flat.

The need for fence posts on ranches and farms in the San Bernardino Valley encouraged Nathan Swarthout to start cutting cedar trees near Saw Pit Canyon in 1867. To gain access, he constructed the Bailey Canyon Road, which connected to the old Bandini Road. The Bailey Canyon road was used until 1872.

Lumbering in the San Bernardino Mountains through the 1860s harvested small to medium-sized trees because the mills and saws of the time could not handle large trees.

The discovery of gold in Holcomb Valley in 1860 spawned a boom town that provided a new market for lumber. By 1883, lumber mills in the San Bernardino Mountains supplied lumber for mining districts throughout the Mojave Desert.

Mills in the mountains were moved from place to place as nearby timber was depleted. By the 1880s, better equipment allowed larger trees to be harvested.

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The demand for lumber in the San Bernardino Valley was so great in the 1880s that a growing portion of the lumber sold in San Bernardino was shipped from Oregon and northern California.

The development of the citrus industry in the San Bernardino Valley in the decade of the 1880s necessitated water for irrigation and lumber for wooden boxes to ship fruit. Lumber mills prospered during the decade. The Bear Valley reservoir was first proposed in 1880; in 1883 the founders of the City of Redlands established the Bear Valley Reservoir and Irrigation Company and by December 1884 pipeline ran from the new reservoir dam to the city of Redlands. But in 1891, the Arrowhead Reservoir Company also began purchasing land, predominantly timber holdings, and effectively ended the period of independent sawmills in the San Bernardino Mountains.

Modern sawmills appeared in the San Bernardino Mountains in 1890. The Highland Lumber Company constructed a mill at Fredalba (near today's Running Springs), developed roads, and planned a railroad; instead of employing 15 or 20 men as the independent sawmills had, the company employed several hundred.

The Highland Lumber Company was purchased by the Brookings Lumber and Box Company in 1898 and became the largest logging enterprise ever undertaken in the San Bernardino Mountains. It controlled 6,000 acres of timber land and leased even more, for a total of eight sections (square miles) of forest. They owned the City Creek Toll Road and thus could control lumber shipments by other, smaller companies. They improved the old Highland Mill, built a company town, and constructed a narrow gauge railroad to haul timber.

The Brookings Lumber Company constructed a box factory at Messina (Highland), where 50 men were employed making citrus shipping boxes: 60 percent of the lumber cut by Brookings was used for citrus crates. In 1904, 10 million feet of lumber were milled, and enough boxes were constructed to supply citrus growers in Highland, Redlands, San Bernardino, Rialto, and Bloomington. The combined logging and box factory operations continued until 1911, when logging in the mountains halted. Brookings moved to Oregon; the box factory continued in operation until 1914 using lumber that had already been sawed at Fredalba.

The Brookings railroad right-of-way was acquired by the County of San Bernardino and used in part as the roadbed for the Rim of the World Drive.

By 1888, concerns about lumbering's effect upon timber stands and watersheds were being voiced, along with complaints that lumber mills removed timber from public lands. Federal forest reserves were set aside starting in 1891 to protect remaining timber resources and water on public lands. President Benjamin Harrison created the San Gabriel Timberland Reserve in 1892 and, in 1893, expanded the area with the San Bernardino Forest Reserve. President McKinley established the San Jacinto Forest Reserve in 1897. In 1905, the reserves became national forests.

Today, the current state of forestry practices in California affords protection to natural resources. Reforestation is required by law and environmental concerns like erosion are carefully mitigated.